

Meets to Discuss Needs of Veterans, Advancements in 111th Congress

Maybrook, NY - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today met with fellow veterans at the Dusenberry-Flannery VFW Post 2064 in Maybrook to outline several new laws recently passed by the House of Representatives that have improved health care and education benefits while modernizing the Veterans Administration budgeting process to ensure proper planning and delivery of those benefits.

"Last year I made my third of four trips to Afghanistan to have Thanksgiving dinner with the troops," said Hinchey. "It once again reminded me of the tremendous debt we owe to those who serve, and one of the main reasons why I've been working so hard to improve veterans' benefits. When they come home, they deserve to have access to high quality health care, education and all of the benefits they've earned. I am committed to ensuring that veterans returning from the front lines don't have to then wait in line to get the services and benefits due to them. We've made important strides in the past several years making sure that the federal government provides the necessary financial support for these programs and succeeded in increasing funding for veteran services by 60%. However, as a result of fighting two wars, the needs only continue to grow, and we need to do more."

Last week, Hinchey voted to pass two new bills: the Veterans' Benefits Act, which will improve job opportunities, benefits, and programs for homeless veterans; and the Securing America's Veterans Insurance Needs and Goals (SAVINGS) Act, which requires life insurance companies to be more honest and transparent in order to help veterans avoid potential scams. Hinchey also highlighted several other accomplishments he has voted for during the last Congress.

- **Updated the G.I. Bill for the 21st Century** - Now law, Hinchey voted to pass the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, providing the greatest overhaul of the G.I. Bill in over 20 years and covering the cost of a college education at a public university. Since August 2009, the VA has issued Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits to almost 250,000 individuals and \$1.2 billion in education benefits have been paid to veterans for education.

- **Provided Advance Appropriations for Veterans Health Care** - As a member of the Appropriations Committee, Hinchey voted to provide advanced appropriations for the VA to stabilize funding for medical care to veterans. Prior to this change, the VA lacked the ability to budget ahead, causing backups and delays in the delivery of services.

- **Increased Funding for Veterans Health Care** - Hinchey has voted to add \$23 billion for

veterans' health care and services since 2007.

- **Increased Support for Veteran Caregivers** - Hinchey voted to pass the the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, which created a program to offer caregiver training, access to mental health counseling, and 24-hour respite care in the veteran's home. The Caregivers Act also allows eligible veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom to select a caregiver to receive a financial stipend along with travel and lodging expenses associated with the veteran's care.

- **Improved Health Care for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans** - Hinchey voted to provide an additional three years of VA health care eligibility for returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans (for a total of five years) and voted to improve and expand the VA's ability to care for returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury.

- **Addressed Urgent Mental Health Needs of Veterans** - Hinchey voted to provide funding for a much needed and long-awaited study on veterans' suicide and to require the VA to provide counseling referrals for members of the Armed Forces who are not otherwise eligible for readjustment counseling. Hinchey also voted to create a 24-hour toll-free suicide hotline which has served more than 115,000 veterans, family members, and friends.

- **Instituted Reforms to Address the Benefits Backlog** - Hinchey helped pass legislation to hire 8,300 additional claims processors and to provide essential reforms to bring the claims processing system up-to-date for more accurate and timely delivery of benefits to veterans, families, and survivors.

- **Updated VA Home Loan Program** - Hinchey voted to provide veterans with the necessary time to readjust from the battlefield back to their homes or communities without fear of losing their home by prohibiting foreclosure for nine months after military service. Hinchey also voted to increase the VA loan limit to better match current home prices and voted to revamp the VA home loan program by enabling more veterans to refinance with VA loans.

- **Expanded Veteran Homelessness Prevention and Care** - Hinchey voted to expand the number of places where homeless veterans may receive support services and voted to require each VA medical center that provides supporting housing services to provide housing counselors.

Hinchey is the also the author of the Carmelo Rodriguez Military Medical Accountability Act, which would allow service members who become victims of medical malpractice at a military medical facility to hold those responsible accountable. Current law prevents malpractice lawsuits from being filed against the military regardless of the egregiousness of the situation. The bill is named after the late Sgt. Carmelo Rodriguez of Ellenville, New York, who died of skin cancer in 2007 after a series of extraordinary mistakes and misdiagnoses made by military medical personnel.

A veteran of the U.S. Navy, Hinchey served in the Pacific on the destroyer U.S.S. Marshall after graduating from high school. As a strong proponent of veterans issue on the House Appropriations Committee, Hinchey traveled to Afghanistan in December 2001 following the U.S. invasion. Last year, during the week of Thanksgiving, he visited the country for a third time to have a holiday dinner with the troops, and then made a fourth trip to the country earlier this year.